

SALUTE TO HONOREE: **Nita Lowey**

I am so honored to be here this evening with so many distinguished guests. And I want to congratulate Africare, your Chairman, all the members of the board, all the volunteers, and all of the admirers we have there today from Africa and all over the country to pay tribute. I cannot tell you how thrilled I am to have this honor to pay tribute to an extraordinary leader, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. And we've been meeting so often Ellen, I feel I've known you forever Madame President. And if I'm joined I can't see you because the lights are so bright but we really are a team working in Congress working together and if I'm joined by my colleagues in Congress, please stand up. I don't know if Barbara Lee is here this evening, but, Barbara Lee, when you had that dress made on that last trip to Africa, looking at the magnificent gowns this evening I wish I had joined you and had one made as well so we have to go back soon.

I recently returned from a whirlwind trip to Africa with my colleagues, 5 countries in 10 days. We don't have pleasure trips, we work. Our delegation had the opportunity to visit Liberia and spend time with President Sirleaf. I know you want to hear all the good things I'm going to say about this president. Now I must tell you while a day doesn't make an expert, I'd like to share some impressions of our trip to Liberia. From the moment our plane began its descent into Monrovia, we were taken by the lushness of the countryside and it's hard to believe when faced with such natural beauty, that this country experienced such horror. We saw first hand the destruction of Liberia's infrastructure after 14 years of civil war, from the roads to the electricity network, to the port, indeed the needs in Liberia are overwhelming and Monrovia, where our delegation visited, as you know, is the most developed.

I do wish infrastructure was President Sirleaf's only challenge but on top of these great needs there are thousands of unemployed, uneducated former fighters and this heightens the urgent need to address security and development. But there is one thing that Liberia has that no money can buy, and no donor can provide, a guiding compass, and she is President Johnson Sirleaf. President Sirleaf represents the best of all of us; she is a woman who has struggled and persevered and yet always remain true to herself, to her values, to her beliefs. President Sirleaf, looked the greatest challenge of her life square in the eye, her home land is disrepair and infrastructure destroyed, thousands without income or livelihood, and an emotionally scared population and committed herself to Liberia rising again. And no detail is too small for this president, and for those of us in this audience who are mothers, grandmothers, we get that, we all micromanage President Sirleaf. This Harvard educated former economist with the World Bank, truly has her finger on the pulse of Liberia. It is a new day, not only for Liberia, but for Africa and I don't say that just because she is the first female African head of state but it is because of the leadership that she represents to every girl on the continent and indeed around the world, she represents that they too can grow up to be president. To people that are sick and tired of being repressed and are hungry for change, she represents what free and fair elections and a democratic process can bring. To leaders who are lining their pockets at the expense of their population, she represents that their time is limited and that a new day is rising in Africa. And to all of us, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf represents the optimism that comes with democratic governance and conscientious leadership in one simple word, President Sirleaf represents hope. Hope for a better future for Liberia, hope for

stronger leadership on the continent, hope for women everywhere, she truly is the Iron Lady and I can think of no more deserving individual for tonight's honor than President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I am so proud to call you a partner and a friend, congratulations.